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ABSTRACT

The organization of three subschools at Grover Cleveland High School, Ridgewook, N. Y., is designed to meet the special needs and desires of the students. The first alternative school is for students with records of excessive absences; the second is for above average students interested in majoring in science; and the third is for average or below average students interested in business careers. (Author/MLF)

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

MINI-SCHOOLS

SUB-SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS WITHIN A SCHOOL

GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL
2127 Himrod Street
Ridgewood, New York 11237

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EA 009 279

The New York City high schools and other urban school systems face a fundamental problem - how to avoid the depersonalization which can so easily characterize a large institution. The alienation which arises from a feeling of anonymity helps to create potential drop-outs and leads to discipline problems. We must try to give each student a sense of identity and belonging, a sense of involvement regarding his own education and the course of his life. The response of a school to this problem will determine whether or not the potential drop-out remains in school to graduate and, in the long run, will determine his attitude towards society and its institutions.

MINI SCHOOLS - ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Five years ago, Grover Cleveland High School decided to try to do something about reducing the number of youngsters who were dropping out of school. The old institution of the home room or official section which attempted to give a student a personal identity in the school was no longer functioning effectively because, due to split sessions and teacher rotation, teachers could no longer be assigned to the same home room for consecutive terms. The school was a growing school and had an enrollment of well over 5000 students.

Whether as a result of societal factors, personal difficulties or earlier educational frustrations, our potential drop-outs viewed the school as a hostile environment. They were the absentees, the scholastic failures, the drop-outs, or occasionally the disrupters. If we were to keep them in school, a new setting which emphasizes inter-personal relationships and involvement had to be devised. We decided upon a small Mini School or sub school which was to be personal, informal and highly individualized.

We determined that our alternative program should be housed in a separate building apart from the main building and, therefore, approached the New York City Board of Education with this request. We did receive an off-site Mini School, and this is the ideal, but actually began the program in a separate wing of our school.

Our goal was to offer a different approach to education for students who were not succeeding in the regular school program. These students were disaffected and displayed their unhappiness with education by being disruptive in the classroom, cutting classes, and absenting themselves from school. The establishment of our alternative program should not be construed as a criticism of the regular school program, but rather as a way of helping those students who were not able to function in the large traditional school setting.

THE AIMS OF OUR PROGRAM ARE:

1. To help potential drop-outs to remain in school and graduate.

2. To place more responsibility on the student for his achievement and behavior.

3. To provide students with a basic knowledge in subject areas.

4. To provide individual attention and guidance for each student.

5. To develop a closer working relationship between students and teachers.

6. To stress a vocational approach within subject areas which will be orientated towards possible high school education or will be career oriented.

7. To allow those who are academically oriented to apply for college.

ORGANIZATION:

The structure of the Mini School is basically the same whether on or off-site. A teacher coordinator assigned by the principal is responsible for administration, scheduling, records, attendance and behavior, liaison with the parent school, functioning of the staff, and handling of the daily problems and crises which arise. The coordinator's leadership role is very important in setting the tone for the Mini School. The coordinator teaches part of the day. Pupil enrollment largely determines the size of the staff. Mini School registers usually range from 60-300, with 150 the norm. Our Mini School presently enrolls 125 students, but we are contemplating expansion. Class registers are kept relatively small by a special allotment from the High School Division and by a commitment on the part of the home high school to allot teaching positions to reduce class size. Consequently, the teacher-student ratio is approximately 1:20. A part-time counselor is assigned to the Mini School. A school aide is assigned for 4 hours each day to be of assistance to the staff and to act as an informal counselor. Textbooks and instructional materials are supplied by the parent school. Our off-site Mini School did receive furniture and some equipment from the New York City Board of Education. The rental fee is also paid by the Board of Education.

STAFFING:

Ideally, teachers are selected on the basis of their ability and desire to work effectively in the flexible, informal, non-traditional setting of the Mini School and to establish rapport with the students. They may volunteer for the assignment or may be recommended by their supervisor or the coordinator. All of our teachers volunteered. The principal must select the teachers based on the needs of the Mini School

and of the regular school. Experience shows that one compromise which must be avoided is to have a teacher assigned part time to the Mini School and part time to the main building. This arrangement is less than satisfactory to teachers and students alike. The racial or ethnic composition of the staff seems to be of little importance to the success of the Mini School. Our students respond to the spirit of the teacher regardless of differences in background. Perhaps it is the small size which makes it possible for students and teachers to overcome stereotypes and to relate to one another in a humanistic way. This is one of the major plusses in being small and it is reflected in the relationship of student to student as well as to and among the staff. The program is supervised by the Principal, Assistant Principal Guidance, and various department chairmen.

SELECTION AND ADMISSION OF STUDENTS:

Our criteria for selection of students is as follows:

1. Minimum reading score of 8.0. (An 8.0 reading score is required by the New York City Board of Education in order to earn a diploma.) The mean reading score is 10.6.

2. Truants and cutters who have shown some potential for success in the past.

3. Discipline cases with potential, e.g. personality conflicts with teachers, excessive cutting. Severe discipline problems or guidance problems should not be accepted.

4. No known drug abusers.

5. Students must have attended at least one year at Grover Cleveland High School.

6. Students must possess a desire to finish school and earn a diploma.

Students may themselves request admission to the Mini School or they may be referred by counselors, deans or teachers. In any case, the student and his/her parent must consent to the placement. A screening interview is held by our counselor to determine if the applicant is likely to profit from the Mini School placement. We have also selected students through the use of a screening committee which included students and Mini School faculty.

Once selected, the student must sign a contract which indicates his/her willingness to obey the code of behavior, to abide by the attendance regulations and to fulfill the academic requirements.

CURRICULUM:

Each Mini School's curriculum is based upon a number of factors; the

requirements of the high school diploma, the nature of the student body; students' interests and requests; the available staff and the physical plant. Alternatives to traditional classroom instruction should be a major consideration. Such programs are recognized by the New York City Board of Education requirements for the high school diploma. "These requirements recognize that schools are developing credit programs and opportunities for alternative in school and out of school experiences. Independent study, work-study programs, community internships and apprenticeships are typical of alternative programs." In addition, the upgrading of student skills in Reading and Mathematics is important.

Our curriculum offers the youngster required courses for graduation in the typical areas, such as English, Social Studies and Mathematics. We also offer independent study in all areas. Community service and work experience programs are encouraged for the more mature youngsters. Students who select independent study, community service or work experience do this in addition to academic classes which they take. This program enables youngsters to make up for lost time and earn a diploma as rapidly as possible. Because the students feel that they have a real chance of catching up, they are willing to put in the effort which is necessary for their success. Occupational orientation, college orientation and group guidance are available to the students by the counselor.

To further implement the guidance program, we have requested and gotten help from an outside organization, The Glendale Human Services, which is a part of Catholic Charities. They assist us by having a psychologist conduct group guidance sessions at our school for the students. We also refer youngsters and their parents to them for out of school in-depth counseling.

STUDENT-STAFF RELATIONSHIPS:

Informality and a warm relationship between students and staff are important. We achieve close inter-personal relationships without relaxing the teacher-pupil roles. The teachers are available to meet with the students and discuss problems or independent study projects whenever they are not teaching. Trips, informal get-togethers at the beginning, and end-of-the-term and group activities, such as school-wide softball games or chess tournaments encourage the teachers and youngsters to work with one another. However, the tone of any Mini School depends upon the personal qualities of the teachers and coordinator rather than on any given policies. Students participate in planning activities and in curriculum, in screening and orientation of new students, and in setting and encouraging the following of standards of conduct. The student government holds regular meetings to discuss school problems and to make recommendations for change. Regular weekly meetings are also conducted by the teachers to discuss school problems and individual youngsters. The greater the students' input in policy making, the greater will be the students' acceptance of regulations, and the greater the peer pressure to conform to them.

COURSE OFFERINGS:

For the Fall 1976 term, the following courses are available to the students in addition to independent study and out-of-school internships:

Classes:*

American Studies 1 & 2
Economics 1
Creative Writing
World Literature
Accounting 1-4
Stenography
Typewriting 1-4
Psychology
Current Issues
Journalism
Modern Dance
Cooking
Communications
Every Day Math
Automotive Ownership
Electronics
Everyday Science
Humanities
Family Living
Business Practices
Urban Affairs
English - Supernatural
Landmark
Nutrition & Health
Science & Social Issues

Internships:

Wyckoff Heights Hospital
Neighborhood Elementary Schools
Pre-Nursery Programs
Superintendent's Office -
Data Processing
Journalism
Senior Citizens Organizations
Neighborhood Government Office

*If a student wishes to take a special class, such as Chemistry or Physics, which is not offered at the Mini School, arrangements are made for the student to take the course at the Main Building.

EVALUATION:

On-going evaluation by the Mini School staff, the students and the administration is necessary. Evaluation on the part of people not connected directly with the Mini School is important - School Superintendent, evaluators from local colleges, evaluators from foundations. The Mini School must constantly encourage change in order to meet the needs of the students.

We feel that our program has been an extremely successful one based on the following facts:

1. Attendance is approximately 85% on any given day.

2. 90% of the students earn a high school diploma. Of the remaining 10%, most do earn an equivalency diploma.

3. Students recognize the need for individual guidance and follow through with the Glendale Human Services Center.

4. 60% of our graduates apply to college. The remainder seek employment with the help of our New York State Employment Counselor.

5. In 1975 we had two New York State Regents Scholarship winners. In 1976 we had one Regents Scholarship winner.

There is no doubt, based upon our evaluations, that the youngsters in our program all were potential drop-outs and that many of them would not have remained in school had it not been for an alternative educational setting.

SUB-SCHOOLS - OTHER SMALL UNIT ORGANIZATIONS

There is a growing recognition that the need for a humanized educational setting is not restricted to the youngster who is having trouble adjusting to school. Specific schools can be organized to serve the student who might otherwise be lost in a very large urban institution. To create a more personalized setting the school can be divided into smaller schools. Sub-Schools may be established for students with special talents in Art or Music, new entrants who require remediation in Reading, students who require a bilingual program, students involved in out of school career internships or students with outstanding ability. A student should have the option of continuing in the Sub-School throughout his high school career or of transferring into another Sub-School if his or her future plans change.

In programming, the students are all assigned to a specific home room, and the home room teacher is one of the teachers from within the Sub-School. The class rooms might be clustered in one area with only the large facilities, such as gymnasiums, lunch rooms and special class rooms used in common. The advantages of such a program are as follows:

(1) Since 100-300 students are programmed for any particular Sub-School, a greater degree of humanization is possible.

(2) Greater school spirit is generated because of better rapport between students, staff and parents.

(3) Students know where to get help and from whom.

(4) Students are able to get early career guidance in an area of their interest.

(5) Other subject areas can relate to the area of concentration that the student is studying.

(6) At the end of their high school career students graduate with an in depth skill in the area of their choice. They are better prepared for the world of work or for further education.

(7) Sub-Schools reduce student alienation. Students do not get lost in the shuffle of a large school. Cutting, absenteeism and disruptive behavior is reduced.

As an example of a Sub-School, we will cite two such programs at Grover Cleveland High School - i. e. Institute For Science & Mathematics Development and The Sub-School in Business.

Institute For Science & Mathematics Development:

Our Institute For Science & Mathematics Development stresses achievement in the area of Mathematics and Science. Our program identifies incoming 9th year students who have ability and interest in these areas.

Requirements For Admission:

(1) Two or more years above grade level in Mathematics.

(2) Two or more years above grade level in Reading.

(3) 90% average in Mathematics and Science.

(4) A minimum of 85% over-all average.

(5) Good attendance, motivated, hard-working student.

Students who meet these qualifications along with their parents are invited to an evening meeting for orientation and an introduction to the program. At this time students have the option to meet individually with the Assistant Principals who supervise Mathematics and Science and with guidance counselors regarding their selection of this program. Upon graduation a student will have completed far more than the required number of Science and Mathematics courses.

Student's Program:

9th Year

	SCIENCE	MATHEMATICS
9th	Regents Biology	9th Year Mathematics
10th	Chemistry plus Science Research, if requested	10th Year Mathematics
11th	Physics Science Research if requested Science Electives, such as Physiology, Botany, Zoology, Ecology	11th Year Mathematics Elective Mathematics or Computer Mathematics
	In the 11th grade, students select a Mathematics or Science specialization(2 majors in one area, one in the other) to be continued in the 12th grade.	
12th	Advanced Placement Biology Science Research Science Electives	12th Year Mathematics Advanced Placement

10th Year

Identifies incoming 10th year students who have ability and interest in Science and Mathematics. (Students from our own 9th year not already in the program may be recommended.)

	SCIENCE		MATHEMATICS
10th	Regents Biology		10th Year Mathematics
11th	Chemistry Science Electives, such as Physiology, Ecology, Zoology, Marine Biology Science Research	or	11th Year Mathematics Mathematics Electives
12th	Advanced Placement Biology or Physics Science Research Science Electives		12th Year Mathematics

The success of the program can be attributed to the following:

(1) Mathematics and Science teachers act as counselors and advisers throughout the student's high school career. This is done through home room assignment and subject class assignment. Students may also meet with teachers to discuss projects and career options or problems whenever the teacher is free.

(2) Students receive career counseling by the teachers, Assistant Principal In Charge of The Area, and our College and Career Counselor.

(3) The Grade Adviser who is familiar with the Science and Mathematics areas discusses programming with the students individually.

(4) Students are encouraged to raise their aspirational levels and to achieve to the extent possible. Group guidance meetings and individual guidance meetings are arranged.

(5) Students are encouraged to spend additional time on Science projects with the help and assistance of the supervisor, teachers and laboratory specialists.

(6) Trips and extra-class activities are sponsored by the Sub-School to reinforce group espirit de corps and person to person rapport.

(7) Students are given the opportunity to have input into decision making regarding the functions of the Sub-School.

(8) Because of the above, better rapport is established between student to student, student to teacher and student-guidance and administration.

The Sub-School In Business:

A Sub-School which identifies incoming 9th and 10th year students who are interested in the business area is our Sub-School In Business. The students are programmed for two classes in the Accounting Department --Business Arithmetic and Data Processing, in addition to a Typewriting class. The Business Arithmetic and Data Processing classes should be programmed for consecutive periods with the same teacher since this offers greater teaching flexibility.

Requirements For Admission:

(1) At grade level in Reading and Mathematics or up to 1 year above level.

(2) Two years below grade level.

(3) Interested in the business area.

(4) Good attendance and well motivated.

(5) Success in school.

The student and his parents are invited to an evening meeting for orientation and an introduction to the program. The orientation of students begins in the feeder schools as part of our articulation program. At this meeting youngsters may discuss career opportunities with teachers, supervisors, and guidance personnel.

Student's Program:

9th Year

	ACCOUNTING		SECRETARIAL STUDIES
9th	Business Arithmetic 1 & 2 Data Processing 1 & 2		Typewriting 1 & 2
10th	Bookkeeping 1 & 2 or Accounting 1 & 2 Data Processing 3 & 4	or	Stenography 1 & 2 (instead of Bookkeeping, Accounting or Data Processing) Typewriting 3 & 4
11th	Bookkeping 3 & 4 or Accounting 3 & 4 Data Processing 5 & 6 Business Law or Elective Work Experience	or	Stenography 3 & 4
12th	Electives to be decided upon with counselor Work Experience		Secretarial Practice Business Electives Work Experience

Other courses, such as English, Reading, Social Studies relate to the business area during various terms, i. e. Business Speech, Business English, Career English, Consumer Education, Advertising Design.

10th Year

	ACCOUNTING		SECRETARIAL STUDIES
10th	Data Processing 1 & 2 Bookkeeping 1 & 2 Typewriting 1 & 2	or	Stenography or Landmark Typewriting 1 & 2
11th	Data Processing 3 & 4 Bookkeeping 2 & 3 Typewriting 3 & 4 Work Experience		Stenography or Landmark Typewriting 3 & 4
12th	Data Processing 5 & 6 Business Law or Electives to be determined with counselor Work Experience		Secretarial Practice Business Electives Work Experience

Other courses - see 9th year program.

Those students who require remedial work in Mathematics and Reading are programmed for these classes until they are no longer in need of them. Group counseling, career counseling as well as trips and other curricular activities which have direct relationship to class room activities are planned throughout the year. Other courses, such as English remedial classes and Social Studies are related to the business area during the student's high school career, i. e. Speech For Business, English For Business, Career English, Consumer Education, Advertising Design. In the 11th and 12th years, students are programmed for Internships and/ or Work Experience so that they can see how the classes they are taking at school actually relate to the skills that are required in the world of work.

For those students who can benefit from further education this opportunity is available. Our Business Sub-School is paired with LaGuardia Community College. The courses that we offer to our 11th and 12th year students in Accounting, Data Processing and Business Law may entitle the student, who has achieved, to college credits. This enables youngsters to apply to a school such as LaGuardia Community College or another college with advanced standing and anywhere from 3-18 college credits. The courses in these subject areas correspond to those which are offered at the college. We feel that whether or not the student chooses to continue his education the courses are extremely valuable.

All of the graduates of this program receive their diplomas with skills and abilities which they would not have if they were not a member of our Sub-School. At the same time, students may elect classes in other areas and in other departments. This enables the student to build an attachment to the school as a whole and not to the Sub-School alone. Athletics, dramatics and other school-wide classes and activities are unifying factors among the varying Sub-Schools.

Because of programs such as those cited and other programs which exist at our school an attempt is being made at dividing a very large school(5000+) into smaller more workable units in order to give students a sense of belonging. Its success is dependent upon the leadership of the principal among faculty and students. Teachers and supervisors need both preliminary and on-going orientation if the school within a school is to be successful. This is only possible when teachers understand the need for acting in the role of a guidance person in addition to being a teacher of a specific body of knowledge. Such humanization within the school will make our educational institutions far more effective and successful for both teachers and students. Diversification and flexibility in the curriculum gives all students a chance to choose educational options and to have input into curriculum design. Being a member of a small group strengthens the student's sense of participation and status, especially if groups of students identify with a cluster of courses around a common theme. It may well be that to provide for a greater degree of humanization and involvement for the entire high school population, a cluster of Sub-Schools with one or more Sub-Schools for alternative education may well be the pattern for large urban high schools.